TAMIL IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE TO SANSKRIT

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First Edition: May 1998, pp. viii + 76

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Composed by
INSTITUTE OF ASIAN STUDIES, Chennai - 600 119.

Printed by
STUDENTS OFFSET SERVICE, Chennai - 600 017.
Ph: 4343862, 582513

Dedicated to the memory of

Dr. S. Ramakrishnan

my teacher
who helped me to establish
the Institute of Asian Studies.

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PREFACE

This monograph is the result of one of my attempts to probe into a very complex area of Tamil culture, namely Tamil identity and Tamil nationalism. It is quite surprising that no other linguistic community of India has shown such a strong resistance to Sanskrit as well as North Indian culture as the Tamil-speaking community of South India.

With the evolution of the three dynasties, namely the Cēra, the Cōḻa and the Pāṇṭiyas from the tribal chieftains engaged in internecine wars, the idea of Tamil nationalism gradually came into existence. The epic *Cilappatikāram* is the first work which gives eloquent expression to Tamil nationalism. Pride in Tamil national heritage and Tamil cultural ascendancy encouraged Tamils to resist the impact of North Indian culture which had spread mainly through Sanskrit. Tamils from the very beginning considered their language, literature and culture as distinct from those of their northern counterpart. Persistent efforts have long been taken by Tamils to preserve their cultural and linguistic identity.

An attempt has been made here to trace historically the Tamil identity and resistance to Sanskrit. This monograph has been written on the request of my friend Dr. T. Wignesan of France who has invited me to present a paper at the International Conference of Asian Scholars to be held in Netherlands in June 1998.

I am very much indebted to my wife Mrs. Indra Samuel, the companion of my life, for encouraging and supporting my academic pursuits.

Many people have helped me in the preparation of this monograph. Mr. Patrick Harrigan of the Multi-media Department of the Institute of Asian Studies has gone through the manuscripts and edited the language. Dr. P. Thiyagarajan, Dr. M.S. Nagarajan, Dr. V. Murugan, Mr. M. Mathialagan, Mr. C. Subramanian and Dr. K. Jaya Kumar have helped me to enrich this monograph by their valuable suggestions.

The entire monograph was written at different intervals within a period of one month in the midst of my heavy administrative burden. Whenever I found time, the material was dictated to my secretary Mrs. G. Ambigai from memory. I extend my thanks to Mrs. G. Ambigai for having taken dictation from me and composed the entire material. My thanks are also due to Mr. R. Ruskin Lavy who incorporated all the corrections made.

Dr. K. Jayakumar prepared the index; Mr. A.S. Natarajan has designed the cover. I extend my heartfelt thanks to these two persons for their kind co-operation. Student Xerox Offset Printers deserve my appreciation for the neat execution of the printing.

Chennai,
15.05.1998.

G. John Samuel

TAMIL IDENTITY AND RESISTANCE TO SANSKRIT

Introduction

The advent of European missionaries who came to India with the intension of widening the Kingdom of Christ, introducing Western education and imposing Western cultural imperialism advocated by Lord Macaulay and others brought about drastic changes in the milieu and mentality of the people of India. The introduction of urban civilization with technological foundation, the laying of railways and the introduction of printing press changed the structure of traditional Indian society which had been based upon agrarian culture for millennia. This shattered the self-sufficient Indian village economic structure and tied the local market to world markets by the newly laid railway routes.

These changes resulted in the emergence of an industrialised society with English-educated middle class and a working class, namely the proletarians. The traditional type of native education was replaced by Western education, which was designed with the objective of producing Indian employees who would be loyal to the British Government and work for cheaper wages.

The age-old feudal system and its social as well as family structures were shattered and the joint family structure of the past gave place to single family pattern comprising the bread-winning man and his wife, whose main responsibility was and remains to bear and rear children.

South Indian Studies

The missionaries who came to South India in the earlier stage showed keen interest in learning the vernacular languages, such as, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada and Telugu. They compiled dictionaries, grammar books and other teaching materials to help their fellow missionaries to learn these languages and to communicate with the common man and spread Christianity effectively. They showed active interest in learning the literature of the common man, his folk traditions, his proverbs, his songs, religion, literature and ethical works. The missionaries were able to discover similarities between the didactic poetry chiefly in Tamil language and the teachings of Jesus Christ. They translated some of these literary works into German, French, English and other European languages. As far as the translation activities are concerned, their interest was centred mainly on ethical literature and devotional poems which were in tune with their main intention, namely proselytism.

Dr. G.U. Pope, who first translated the *Tirukkuṟaḷ* into English, sees in it the echoes of Jesus Christ's *Sermon on the Mount.* He was of the opinion that St. Thomas, the disciple of Christ, came to Mylapore and propagated the teachings of Christ which might have influenced Tiruvaḷḷuvar, the author of *Tirukkuṟaḷ*.[1] He also translated *Tiruvācakam* into English under the title *Sacred Utterances* and was immersed in the emotional outpouring and devotional sentiments expressed in the hymns of Māṇikkavācakar, a Saivite saint.[2]

Sanskritology and Dravidology

Although the earlier missionaries learned the Malabar languages, especially the four Dravidian languages of South India, and translated a large number of literary works into their languages, Dravidian studies failed to gain momentum owing to the unfortunate shifting of the early missionary's activities to Calcutta, which was a blessing in disguise to Sanskritology. Until this time the missionaries knew about Sanskrit and its literature only through South Indian sources. The shifting of the missionary's activities to Calcutta was one of the important factors which were detrimental to the growth of Dravidian research by foreign scholars and civil servants. At the same time, this trend paved the way for the promotion of Indo-Aryan studies, especially Sanskrit studies in a wider perspective.[3] The founding of the Asiatic Society by great stalwarts like Sir. William Jones, Max Mueller and others brought a sea-change in the academic activities of the missionaries and civil servants whose attention was drawn to aspects of Indian culture enshrined in Sanskrit literature. Sir William Jones, Max Muller and others translated a large number of Sanskrit works into European languages and exerted a deep impact upon European poets, especially the romantic poets of Germany, France, England and America. Western poets who had used Hellenic and Hebraic themes started experimenting with Indian themes which reached them through translation. The whole of Europe started evincing active interest in Sanskrit studies and poets began to draw their themes and images from Sanskrit literary works. Departments were started in European and Asian universities with a view to studying Sanskrit literature and Indian philosophy, especially the Vedic and Upanisadic traditions. Many Asian countries including Japan showed interest

in studying Buddhist texts, mainly Mahayana texts in Sanskrit. Consequently, Sanskrit attained international recognition as one of the classical languages of the world along with Latin and Greek.[4]

Dravidian Studies and Dr. Caldwell

Dravidian studies were largely neglected and Indology was wrongly identified with Sanskritology owing to the excessive fascination that the West had in Sanskrit studies. They wrongly thought that a grasp of Sanskrit alone will be adequate for an understanding of Indian culture as a whole. This was the misconceived trend that prevailed in those days. Like the traditional Sanskrit grammarians, the Western world also mistakenly believed *that the South Indian* languages including Tamil were mere derivatives of Sanskrit.

However, this belief was shattered in due course by missionaries and civil servants like Ellis, William Campbell and Bishop Caldwell. In his foreword to the book *Grammar of the Telugoo Language* by William Campbell, Francis Whyte Ellis for the first time argued that the four languages, namely Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam form a separate family distinct from the so-called Indo-Aryan, among which Sanskrit is the premier language. This observation by Ellis inaugurated a new chapter in the history of Dravidian studies.

Following Ellis and William Campbell, the Bishop of Tirunelveli, Dr. Caldwell, ventured on a comparative study of South Indian languages.[5] Although his main aim in the initial stage was to prove the Biblical conception that all languages of the world

originated from one common source, he stumbled on the conviction that the languages spoken in South India formed a separate family distinct from the other families of languages spoken in India. In his first edition of the *Comparative Grammar of South Indian or Dravidian Languages*, Dr. Caldwell came to the conclusion that the nine languages spoken in South Indian regions form a separate family. He introduced the term Dravidian, a word which had been used in one of the early Sanskrit texts namely *Tantravarttika* by Kumarila Bhatta to refer to the South Indian languages, especially Tamil language. Dr. Caldwell divided the Dravidian languages under two broad categories namely: (l) the cultivated languages and (2) the uncultivated languages. According to him, languages which have a script and a legacy of literature can be called cultivated languages. Consequently, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada and Telugu come under the category of cultivated languages. Other languages like Tulu, Badaga, Toda, Kota etc., which are only in the spoken form, are termed as uncultivated languages. Although modern linguists do not accept this nomenclature, the credit of inaugurating Dravidology as a new discipline of academic research in an objective manner rightly goes to Bishop Caldwell.

In the revised edition of his book Dr. Caldwell added three more Dravidian languages and came to the conclusion that Dravidian languages are twelve in number. It was at a time when comparative philology had not developed in its full form that Bishop Caldwell was able to produce such a monumental work. The Grimm brothers and few early philologists started studying Indo-European languages with a comparative perspective about this. Clear theories pertaining to phonology, morphology and syntax had not

yet been developed at that time. With all these limitations, Caldwell was able to prove that Dravidian languages form a separate family and that they have unique standing independent of Sanskrit and other Indo-Aryan languages. Thus, the age-old conviction about the origin of Tamil language, especially the notion that Tamil is derived from Sanskrit, was disproved by this foreign missionary, who is considered to be the father of Dravidian studies.[6] Unitil his time, it was believed that the two languages, namely Sanskrit and Tamil, originated from the music that emanated from the drum of Lord Siva and that Sanskrit had been given to the North Indian grammarian Pānini and Tamil to the Brahmnical sage Agastiyar, who brought it to South India and propagated it among the inhabitants of the South.[7] Thus, a new era was inaugurated with the epoch-making discovery of Dravidian languages by Dr. Caldwell.

New Dimensions in Dravidology

After the epoch-making discovery of Caldwell, further research was undertaken by the Linguistic Survey of India headed by Grearson and Stenkonow. In the supplement volume of this survey it is made clear that Dravidian languages are fourteen in number and that a few Dravidian languages are spoken in North India also. It is surprising to note that a Dravidian language namely Brahui, is spoken in Baluchistan. Two other Dravidian languages, Kurukh and Malto, have been identified in North Indian regions. This has raised a number of questions among Indologists, especially anthropologists, about the Dravidian race's spread and migration. It was clear that the linguistic communities that speak Dravidian languages were present throughout India even before the advent

of the Aryans. Archaeologists uncovered fresh evidence that the urban civilization of Mohenjadharo and Harappa belonged to the Dravidians, who were later overrun by the nomadic Aryans. The Dravidian-speaking community, which is supposed to have come from the Mediterranean region and spread throughout India, was pushed into the southern part of India by the invading Aryans who brought their heritage of Vedic traditions and in course of time the Sanskrit language. This conclusion has been supported not only by linguistic data from Dravidian languages but also by archaeological evidence from the excavation of Harappa and Mohenjadharo, as well as by a recent study of the place names of North India which has proved beyond doubt that a large number of place names of North India are of Dravidian origin.[8]

With the establishment of departments and chairs in European, American and Asian universities for the study of South Indian languages and culture in particular and Indology in general, academicians started probing deep into the various aspects of Dravidian languages, literatures, and cultures. The contributions made by foreign scholars like Dr. T. Burrow,[9] Dr. M.B. Emeneau,[10] Dr. Kamil Zvelebil,[11] Dr. M.S. Andronov,[12] et al., in this area of study is indeed immense. With the untiring efforts of these stalwarts and with the collaboration of native scholars, research on Dravidian languages and cultures has gained momentum at the global level. It has now been shown that there are more than thirty languages in the Dravidian family.

On the basis of generic relationship, geographical distribution and shared innovations, the Dravidian languages are normally brought under three major groups, namely the South Dravidian,

the Central Dravidian, and the North Dravidian. Languages like Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Tulu, Kodagu, Badaga, Toda, Kota and Irula come under the South Dravidian category. Telugu, Kui, Kuvi, Kolāmi, Naiki, Parji, Gadaba, etc., come under Central Dravidian, whereas Kurukh, Malto, Brahui etc., come under North Dravidian.[13]

With the momentum that had been initiated by Dravidian linguists, there is now a growing awareness among Indologists that the previous approach regarding the study of Sanskrit for the understanding of Indian culture has to be revised drastically. A mere grasp of Sanskrit alone is inadequate for a complete comprehension of Indian culture as a whole. If Indian culture is to be studied properly, then South Indian studies have to be taken into serious consideration. Sanskrit literature can give only a partial picture of India and not a holistic or organic view of India as a whole. Consequently, the hitherto neglected field of South Indian studies was given greater importance by Indian as well as foreign Indologists. Today it is generally agreed that for a complete picture of Indology and a better understanding of Indian culture, a thorough grasp of South Indian languages and literatures is indispensable. Indian culture is represented by Sanskrit and Tamil, the two classical languages representing North India and South India. An approach of studying the contribution of South India to the composite culture of India is now widely accepted. It was Dr. Thomas Burrow who for the first time identified a number of Tamil words in Vedic texts.[14] Consequently, it has been proved that there are mutual borrowing of lexical items both by Sanskrit from Tamil and Tamil from Sanskrit from the prehistoric period onwards.

Resistance to Sanskrit

Although there have been mutual influences between these two languages, literatures, and cultures, there has been a tendency to resist North Indian culture and Sanskritic influence in South India from time immemorial. Early Tamil scholars and grammarians, beginning with Tolkāppiyar, tried to avoid Sanskrit influence as far as possible and sought to establish the uniqueness of South Indian or Tamil traditions in all spheres. Consequently, from the prehistoric period to the present we can see two parallel cultural streams running side by side in the Indian subcontinent, namely the Aryan and the Dravidian. Two distinctive cultural streams can be clearly seen when we view in a wider perspective Indian literature, which forms part of the superstructure of ancient Indian society. A comparison of the early Tamil and Sanskrit literatures even on a superficial level clearly shows the distinct modes of thinking of the Sanskritic North and the Dravidian South.

The earliest corpus of Tamil poetry, popularly known as *Caṅkam* literature, differs from the earliest strata of Sanskrit literature in manifold facets.[15] The milieu and mentality of the authors and poets of these two linguistic communities or regions differ considerably in the theme and manner of their poetic composition. *Caṅkam* literature portrays a society inspired and led by war-like heroes who were the aristocracy of that period. The *Caṅkam* corpus of poetry is divided into two broad thematic structures, namely *akam* which deals with inner feelings and *puṟam*, the life of the man in society or feelings pertaining to the outside world. Consequently, love and war, marital relationship and social enterprises form the basic themes of *Caṅkam* literature. While *akam*

literature portrays the protagonist in his family background, *puṟam* literature depicts him in his outside activities. In both thematic divisions the ruling aristocracy forms the nucleus of early Tamil literature. Consequently, *Caṅkam* poetry has been described as heroic poetry by Kailasapathy[16] and others, even though aspects of post-heroic literature are also discernable in them. The king or the chieftain or the warrior acts as the central figures in *Caṅkam* literature. Consequently, *Caṅkam* literature may be termed as Kshatriya literature which centres around the martial hero.

Caṅkam Literature and Sanskrit Poetry

On the other hand, Sanskrit literature of the same period depicts a theocratical society centred on the Brahmin priest and his sacrifice. The prosperity of the earth, its fertility, the richness of the king, the chastity of women, the order in the phenomenal world: all depends upon the sacrifice performed by the Brahmin priest. In short, ancient Aryan society centred around the Brahmin priest. Consequently, the Brahmins occupied the highest stratum of the social hierarchy in traditional *Varṇāśrama Dharma*. The king who is a Kshatriya is always at the beck and call of the Brahmin priest.

In South India, however, the situation was entirely different. One of the poems in *Puṟanāṉūṟu* describes the role of the king thus: 'Paddy is not the source of life. Even water is not essential for living. But the king is the life of the entire earth.' (*Nellum uyiraṉṟē, nirum uyiraṉṟē maṉṉaṉ uyirtte malartalai ulakam*).[17] This dictum of *Caṅkam* society clearly reveals the milieu and mentality of the ancient Tamil social structure. It was a society which seldom bothered about the otherworld, the invisible Godhead, mystical

experiences or supernatural powers.[18] It is through and through earthly and materialistic in outlook. In this respect ancient Tamil society invites comparison with ancient Greek society. For Tamils, life on this earth is most important. This is explained in *Tolkāppiyam* in a very eloquent manner. The ancient Tamil grammarian says that the goal of earthly existence is to lead a useful family life with a faithful wife and loving children, extending hospitality to kith and kin as well as to guests:

> *"kāmañcāṉṟa kaṭaikōṭ kālai*
> *ēmañcāṉṟa makkaḷoṭu tuvaṉṟi*
> *aṟampuri cuṟṟamoṭu kiḻavaṉum kiḻattiyum*
> *ciṟantatu payiṟṟal piṟantataṉ payaṉē".*[19]

In the corpus of ancient Tamil poetry, a saint or an ascetic is looked down upon as an object of sympathy. There is a beautiful poem in *Puṟanāṉūṟu* in the form of a song of pity sung about a handsome young man who has given up his amorous life with pretty damsels and became an ascetic with long hair, taking bath in waterfalls and eating raw fruits and herbs.[20] This clearly shows the difference in the social outlook of the Sanskritic North and the Tamil South.

The Transient World

Early Sanskrit literature concentrates mainly on the other world and the temporal nature of the present world which is merely an illusion and transient in nature. Pursuit of the ultimate reality in the midst of the sordid illusion forms the theme of early Sanskrit poetry in which the priest occupies the central role. In *Caṅkam* literature, earthly life and revelling in materialistic pleasures form

the basic motif. Therefore, we may generalize that while ancient Tamil society was concerned with this world, Sanskrit works are concerned with the otherworld. From the prehistoric time onwards Tamil society emphasised certain virtues for which North Indian society gave only minor importance. Among heroic virtues, two archetypal concepts dominating the poems of love and war are *nāṇ* (shame) *pukal̠* (fame). The main motive of the hero in this worldly existence is to cultivate *pukal̠* and die when he is saddled with *nāṇ*. There are many such instances in the heroic poetry of the ancient Tamils which are hardly prominent in early Sanskrit poetry.

Divine Chastity

Ancient Tamil society as revealed in *Caṅkam* literature was in a transitional stage regarding social structure as well as ethical concepts and domestic values. These literary works depict a society which was gradually changing from a tribal structure to a monarchal pattern. As far as the relationship of men and women is concerned, one can see that monogamous marriage and polygamy existed side by side. Being a heroic society with frequent military exploits and martial activities, the male population reduced considerably while the female population remained stable. Since elite circles insisted on monogamy, especially for women, the mould was set for a social structure in which there were many women who had no opportunity to get married. They have been described in *Caṅkam* poetry as *varaivin̠ makaḷir*, which means women who have no opportunity to get married. This paved the way for a dichotomy in society in which the fair sex was divided into two groups, namely married women and women who could not marry. Consequently,

ancient Tamil society bestowed its art forms upon the courtesans who were not able to come into the monogamous pattern of marriage. This is well revealed in the Tamil epic *Cilappatikāram* in the conflict between Kaṇṇaki, the faithful domestic wife and Mātavi, the courtesan who is proficient in singing and dancing. Subsequently, chastity was given topmost priority as a feminine virtue and is described as divine chastity (*teyva kaṟpu*) This is imposed only upon woman in the monogamous pattern of family life and not upon man. The concept of divine chastity was very much emphasised in ancient Tamil society.

This aspect is less prominent in ancient Sanskrit literature or in North Indian society. In *Puṟanāṉūṟu*, we have a depiction of the queen of a Pandya king namely Kōpperuñcōlaṉ mounting her lord's funeral pyre in an act of self-immolation, ridiculing scholars who had tried to prevent her from this gruesome act.[21] In the same period we have in Sanskrit literature a heroine namely Damayanti who made an announcement for her second marriage *svayamvara*, after her husband Naḷa had been missing for a short time. This clearly shows that the ethical standards maintained by the two cultures regarding wedded fidelity were significantly different. This difference can be seen throughout the civilization of the South and the North.

Divinity

When we examine the religious aspects of these two linguistic communities we see significant differences in them. God in Tamil society was a local deity who was immanant and not transcendental like orthodox Hindu gods. Early Tamil people mainly worshipped

natural phenomena like the sun, the moon, etc., and powers like *aṇaṅku* which was believed to be an awe-inspiring spirit dwelling in bamboo forests, sometimes in the white umbrella of the king or in the breast of woman. It is a destructive force and it can be made beneficial to man by appeasing it. *Aṇaṅku* in ancient Tamil society should be brought under control, otherwise it may work havoc. *Aṇaṅku* in woman is controlled by the husband; *aṇaṅku* in a kingdom is controlled by the king. According to G.L. Hart, the *aṇaṅku* in Kaṇṇaki was instrumental in setting ablaze the city of Madurai.[22]

This *aṇaṅku* is otherwise called *cūr* which ultimately has been personified as a demon namely Cūrapatmaṉ.The hero who controlled this devastating power is portrayed as the young handsome deity Murukaṉ. The conflict between the two concepts *aṇaṅku* and Murukaṉ gave birth to a number of myths with the rise of Sanskrit influence in the course of time.

Wedded Fidelity

There is a marked difference between these two societies regarding man-woman relationship. Sanskrit tradition classifies marriage into eight divisions: *Brahmam, Āriṣam, Teyvam, Prajapatyam, Āsuram, Gandharvam, Rakshasam* and *Paisacam*. But these eight types were rejected by ancient Tamil society. Tamil society accepted only two types of man-woman relationship which are known as *kaḷavu* (premarital or clandestine type of union) and *kaṟpu* (wedded fidelity or marital relationship). The *Gandharvam* type of marriage mentioned in Sanskrit texts is comparable to *kaḷavu* of the Tamil tradition. It was obligatory that *kaḷavu* type of relationship should end in wedding whereas in *Gandharvam*, the

lovers need not enter into wedded life. When there was some confusion about these two concepts in the mind of a northern king named Pirakattaṉ, the Tamil poet Kapilar composed the beautiful poem *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu* to clarify his doubt.[23] This clearly shows that the Tamil genius of yore resisted the influences of Sanskrit and took utmost care in maintaining the linguistic purity and cultural uniqueness of their race.

This resistance can be seen at the linguistic level too. Whenever there were borrowings between these two languages, Tamil grammarians devised certain rules for borrowing words from Sanskrit. According to the ancient grammar *Tolkāppiyam*, any word borrowed from Sanskrit should be changed in accordance with the phonemic structure of Tamil before allowing them into day-to-day usage.[24] Consequently, words with aspirated sounds have been nativised in Tamil language by removing the aspiration. The phonemic structure of the native language was respected and borrowed words changed in accordance with Tamil phonemic structure. Well-codified rules of grammar, theory of poetry, rules pertaining to prosody and rhetoric were compiled and enumerated clearly with a view to maintaining the language's linguistic, cultural and literary uniqueness and purity. The so-called academies for the promotion of Tamil, popularly known as *Caṅkam*, played a vital role in all these experimentation.[25]

Nativisation

Although the Tamil genius showed strong resistance to North Indian culture, nevertheless there was considerable impact by Northern culture on Tamil society from *Caṅkam* period onwards.

But what is unique in the Tamil tradition is that whatever elements had been borrowed were completely nativised or Tamilized to suit the Tamil temperament and ethos. At the same time, North Indian elements were clearly identified and labelled as *vaṭacol vaḻakku* or *vaṭavar neṟi.* The end of the *Caṅkam* period witnessed North Indian influence that penetrated into Tamil society in the form of the four religious traditions, namely Brahminical, Buddhist, Jain and Ajivaka. Although these religions were accepted by Tamil society, they underwent drastic modifications in the process of nativisation and in fact they took a new birth in the Tamil soil. Vedic traditions and the three heterodox religions were completely assimilated in the Tamil soil and took entirely new forms here. The patterns of worship, mythological traditions, ritual aspects, philosophical reflections, ethical content, cosmology-all underwent changes in Tamil society. Consequently, we have Tamil Hindu tradition, Tamil Buddhist tradition, Tamil Jain tradition and Tamil Ajivaka tradition respectively.

The above orthodox and heterodox religions became part and parcel of medieval Tamil society, deviating from the original source to a large extent. The ideals of these religions entered into the post-heroic corpus of Tamil literature and hence we have in the *Caṅkam* anthology a number of poems with ethical content propagating the ethics of either the orthodox Brahminical traditions or the three heterodox religions.

With the advent of these religions the secular character of the native Tamil tradition underwent modifications and the interaction between the Tamil South and the Sanskrit North deepened. Yet the resistance shown towards North Indian culture

still prevailed to a lesser degree. For the first time we have an extensive ethical literature in Tamil coming into existence at the very end of the *Caṅkam* period. As a result of this impact, the earlier Tamil society which had revelled in nature's plenty and amorous life started viewing earthly pleasure as an illusion. This type of reflective poetry entered into the Tamil ethos with the advent of four religious traditions which have fatalism as a main undercurrent. The earthly life with deep-rooted family ties began to be viewed as an illusion by the Tamil mind with the advent of North Indian religions. The earthly life is looked down upon as phenomenal in character and temporal in nature. Poets started making a clarion call that the world is cruel and that we should derive some happiness out of it:

"இன்னாதம்ம இவ்வுலகம்;
இனிய காண்க இவற் றணிந்தோரே" [26] (புறம்)

"*iṉṉātamma ivvulakam*
iṉiya kāṇka ivaṟ ṟaṇintōrē" *(Puṟam)*

In the corpus of *Caṅkam* literature, a new poetic theme *Kāñci* came into existence. The earliest grammarian *Tolkāppiyar* defined this poetic situation as concerned with the fact that although this world is endowed with all material prosperity, it is evanescent and transient in nature and temporal in character.[27] Basing on this poetic situation the *Caṅkam* poet Māṅkuṭi Marutaṉār composed the poem *Maturaik kāñci* dealing with the pompous and luxurious life at Madurai and bringing home the truth that all these glories lead but to the grave.[28] Thus, in materialistic Tamil society, the theme of fatalism and illusion started exerting influence, leading to the emergence of ethical literature, especially the corpus of eighteen

didactic works, known as *Patineṇkīḻkkaṇakku* with *Tirukkuṟaḷ* or the sacred couplet as the premier work. It is significant to note that most of the authors of these works belong either to orthodox Hinduism or heterodox Jainism or Buddhism. Although Ajivaka religion came to Tamil Nadu when Buddhism and Jainism entered, it failed to gain momentum as a separate religion. Some scholars are of the opinion that the famous song in *Puṟanāṉūṟu* starting with the line *yātum ūrē yāvarum kēḷir*[29] (every country is my country; even man is my kinsman) has as its central idea the description of the relationship between the cosmos and human soul as enunciated in the Ajivaka faith.

The Caste Struggle

Karl Marx, while describing the development of history, defines it as the product of class struggle, the conflict between two classes that are juxtaposed.[30] But in the Indian context, the central motive or the moving force behind history is not class struggle but the struggle between various castes and *varṇas*. By studying the history of Tamil Nadu as well as the history of Tamil literature, one can to see that the struggle between the different *varṇas* or the various castes is the decisive force behind Tamil society. Consequently, Tamil literature, which is a part of Tamil society directly or indirectly, represents the struggle among the various *varṇas* and castes. Consequently, we have Tamil literature throughout the ages representing the dominance of different castes and *varṇas*. If we fail to study the history of caste struggle, we cannot understand properly either the social or political history of the Tamils or the history of Tamil language or its rich legacy of literature. Therefore, it is indispensable at this stage to examine

and evaluate the role of the various conflicts that took place between the various castes and *varṇas* in shaping the socio-political and literary history of the Tamil-speaking community.

As mentioned, *Caṅkam* literature depicts the hegemony of the Kshatriyas among the traditional four *varṇas*, namely the *Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya* and *Śudra*. The fact that the *varṇa* structure penetrated into Tamil society is obvious from *Tolkāppiyam* which speaks of the various vocations allotted to the four *varṇas*.[31] It is obvious that *Caṅkam* literature also speaks about a number of indigenous castes such as *Pāṇaṉ, Tuṭiyaṉ, Paṟayaṉ, Kaṭampaṉ* etc.,[32] which are considered to be the castes of the lower order. Consequently, one can easily notice the existence of two broad systems of social structure, namely the elite tradition and the folk tradition. The elite tradition prefers a kind of Sanskritization while the folk tradition depends upon local cults, rituals, beliefs and practices, etc. Although resistance to Sanskrit influence was noticeable in Tamil culture from the prehistoric period, the *varṇa* system found an indispensable place in Tamil society and became part and parcel of the Tamil ethos. This is clearly understandable from the post-heroic literature, which speaks about the evolution of the three great monarchies, namely the Cēra, the Cōḻas and the Pāṇṭiyas. The *Caṅkam* literature or the Tamil heroic poetry is Kshatriya literature from this point of view in which the ruling Kshatriya occupies the central role. The Brahmin priest-cum-scholars were well respected and their sacrifices were encouraged by Tamil monarchs. Ancient Tamil poets such as Kapilar were described as Brahmin poets of high order functioning as counsellors or advisors to the Tamil kings.

There are instances of sacrifices performed by Brahmins which were attended by kings. In *Patirruppattu* (Seventh decade) the king Celvakkaṭuṅkōvāḻiyātaṉ is described as the one who bows his head only before Brahmins.[33] This clearly shows that Brahmanical domination was a fact in the post-heroic Tamil corpus. In the earlier stage the artistic intelligentsia of Tamil society consisted mainly of illiterate minstrels or bards like *pāṇaṉ, viṟali,* etc. They recited the heroic achievements of kings or chieftains and functioned as agents of propaganda to glorify the kings and justify even the gruesome deeds of their patrons before the public. The early minstrels were believed to be endowed with supernatural powers like curing diseases and foretelling the future. The general belief was that if they praise a king, the kingdom will prosper, and if they curse him the kingdom will suffer.[34] Consequently, the ruling Kshatriyas or royal aristocracy regarded the minstrels with a sense of awe and fear. They were believed to be the mouth of prophecy; they functioned not only as bards but also as priests and magicians. They are described as *mutuvāy iravalar* which means bards endowed with ancient wisdom. We should not interpret *mutuvāy* as 'old mouth', since this epithet is attributed both to the bards and to the lizard which also has foretelling faculty.

When the *varṇa* system entered into Tamil society and Sanskrit influence began exerting influence upon Tamil society, gradually the bards who had occupied an important place with the Kshatriya rulers were replaced and the newly emerging Brahmin priest-cum-scholars replaced them. This trend eventually put an end to the bardic age and inaugurated a new chapter in the history of early Tamil literature, namely the age of the poets. Consequently, bards declined in the social hierarchy and later degenerated to the level

of beggars, sometimes fishermen, and in certain occasions they act as go-betweens among harlots and wealthy persons. Most of the poets who belong to the age of *pulavaṉ* or poets preferred Sanskritization although they derived their poetic materials from local bardic traditions. They started improvising myths tracing the ancestry of Tamil kings to North Indian sages. Kapilar traces the origin of the king Iruṅkōvēḷ to a sacrifice performed by a Sanskrit sage.[35] Although Sanskrit was popularised by these poets, Tamil society still remained a milieu dominated by the Kshatriyas. The ancient bardic metre popularised by the traditional bards known as *akavunar* who accompanied their songs by waving a wand in their hands was named *akavaṟpā*. With the coming of the new poets the *akavaṟpā* which means the metre of the *akavaṉ* was given the new name *āciriyappā* which means the metre of the (Sanskrit) scholar or teacher.

Nevertheless, the encroachment of the Brahmin poet and the impact of Sanskritization never really changed ancient Tamil society, which remained a society with Kshatriya hegemony. The advent of Buddhism, Jainism and Ajivakam brought more and more resistance to Sanskrit influence, although these religions came from the North. The Brahmanical Vedic religion alone fought a losing battle in introducing much of Sanskrit culture in Tamil Nadu. The dominance of the heterodox religions checked the imposition of Brahmanical traditions into South India especially in Tamil Nadu.

The Heterodox Religions

It is interesting to note that the three heterodox religions namely Buddhism, Jainism and Ajivakam started as confronting

forces against Brahmanism and all belong to the same period. In fact, these religions were founded by three persons who were contemporaries and who were all Kshatriyas: Gautama Buddha, Mahavira and Markali Kausalyaputra were the founders of these religions and they were all princes from the Kshatriya community. Consequently, these religions came as a revolt against orthodox Brahminism. When we look into the religious climate of North India, we see two different movements before the advent of the above three heterodox religions. On the one hand there was the orthodox Vedic school centred upon the Brahmanical cult of sacrifices and on the other hand we have the *saruvahas*, who are basically atheists. The Lokayata doctrine of the *saruvahas* were completely opposed to the Brahmanical cult. They form two extreme forces, each challenging the other. *Saruvahas* challenged the existence of God, religious rites and rituals, and the concept of the other world, whereas the Vedic cult believed in the transcendental Godhead and the concept of the other world and the life and soul after death.

Although the three heterodox religions challenged Brahmanical rites, they occupied a central place between the Vedic Brahmanism and the atheist position. The three heterodox religions may be labelled as Kshatriya religions which challenged the entire Vedic outlook. They even challenged the *varṇa* system with the Brahmin as the topmost in rank. According to the Buddhist hierarchy, the Kshatriya occupies the topmost place in the *varṇa* structure and the Brahmin the second position. It is interesting to note that the three heterodox religions had been received well in Tamil Nadu both by the ruling aristocracy and by the business community, the Vaishyas. In fact, the Vaishya community

patronised the heterodox religions very extensively. Buddhism and Jainism prospered in the Tamil-speaking area under the patronage of the Vaishya community.

In Tamil Nadu, although the Kshatriyas were powerful as the ruling class thanks to sea trade, the Vaishyas became more affluent than the ruling community. Consequently, in many instances we can see close political alliances between Kshatriya and Vaishyas, especially after the 2nd century A.D.

The evolution of the Vaishyas

Although the *Caṅkam* period was heroic in nature, agriculture was its main mode of production. One of the poems in *Puṟanāṉūṟu* speaks about taxation as well as the suffering of the peasants owing to the collection of heavy land taxes by the ruling aristocracy.[36] This clearly shows that with the establishment of the three great monarchs, administrative procedures became more sophisticated, lands were clearly measured and taxes fixed. In the same society, side by side one can see the gradual evolution of tradesmen mainly from the Paratavar fishing community. The main business of this community in the initial stage seems to be selling salt to villagers in the hilly area as well as in pastoral and agricultural hamlets. There are instances of these tradesmen carrying salt in bullock carts; such groups are called *Cāttu* in Tamil. Eventually we find these tradesmen engaged in selling pearls obtained from the sea. In due course, tradesmen from the fishing community engaged in maritime enterprises and developed trade with nearby islands, namely, Singapore, Java, Sumatra, Sri Lanka, Anthaman and Nicobar islands.[37]

The business community thus gradually got Sanskritized and equated themselves with Vaishya (*Vaṇikar*) of the four *varṇas*. This group of Tamil society became affluent in the post-heroic age with the expansion of trade both inside the country and abroad. Initially business was done through exchange of commodities, and in course of time with the introduction of coinage it prospered even more. In addition to neighbouring islands, they also developed commercial relations with the Greeks and Romans who are commonly referred to in *Caṅkam* literature as *Yavaṉas*.

Contact of the Greeks with India developed mainly overland after the invasion by Alexander the Great. They came to Tamil Nadu mainly through North India. But the contact of the Romans was mainly through the sea route. Tamil Nadu played host to many Roman soldiers and traders during the *Caṅkam* period; there are references made to them in *Puṟanāṉūṟu* and other works of the eight anthologies.[38] *Mullaippāṭṭu* and *Perumpāṇāṟruppaṭai* speak extensively of Roman soldiers and Roman traders.[39] There is evidence of Roman soldiers guarding the palace of the Pandya kings.[40] The recent excavations at Arikkamēṭu and other places of Tamil Nadu uncovered a large number of Roman coins mainly belonging to the period of the Augustus Caesar and other Roman kings. *Caṅkam* literature speaks about a Roman settlement near Kavirippūmpaṭṭiṉam.[41]

The main commodities of this trade seems to have been pepper, sandalwood, pearls, etc., In this context, we can see the emergence of port cities in Tamil Nadu, which have been extensively referred to in the travel reports of Ptolemy and others. Kavirippūmpaṭṭiṉam which was known as Pūmpukār in the Cōḻa country, Koṟkai in the

Pandya kingdom, and Muciṟi in the Cēra country were busy ports in the *Caṅkam* period and were responsible for sea trade of the Tamils with far off countries. In addition to these important ports, there were a number of smaller ports in and around Tamil Nadu. With the increase of such trade, especially the trade of spices and luxury goods like pearls, the newly emerged Vaishya community prospered and the members of this community led a luxurious life, sometimes more luxurious than the ruling aristocracy. In fact, the ruling aristocracy had only political power whereas the wealth of the country was with the Vaishyas. Consequently, we find the hegemony of the Vaishyas in the above social milieu and the Vaishyas always considered themselves equal to the kings in social status. They call themselves *maṉṉaṟ piṉṉōr* which means next to the kings.[42] Merchants even went to the extent of using royal insignia like white umbrella, elephant and royal drum in their domestic functions. A typical example of this instance can be seen in the Vaishya epic, *Cilappatikāram*. In the wedding function of the main Vaishya characters Kaṇṇaki and Kōvalaṉ, elephants come in procession and royal insignia like the white umbrella are lifted on the back of elephants.[43] This gives a graphic picture the post-*Caṅkam* period in which the Vaishya community occupied a prominent position in society.

Political Alliance

The alliance between the Kshatriya and Vaishya was inevitable during this period mainly for effective administration. For the development of urbanised capitals near the main seaports, the ruling Kshatriyas needed the support of the affluent Vaishyas.[44] The port cities of Tamil Nadu were dominated by Vaishyas.

Paṭṭiṉappālai and *Cilappatikāram* speak about the luxurious and pompous life of the Vaishyas at Pūmpukār. With surplus wealth there arose a leisurely class in the Vaishya community which is represented in the portrayal of Kōvalaṉ in *Cilappatikāram*. They lavishly spent money on lascivious life; this is depicted in the portrayal of dancing harlots represented by Mātavi.

Against this background, the ideals of early heroic society underwent drastic changes. The main motive of the heroic age was to expand one's territories and to maintain power. Consequently, martial heroism was the driving force of heroic society. But for the Vaishyas exhibition of physical heroism was not at all necessary. They needed capital funds for investment on trade which will earn them surplus income. They accumulated their wealth through trade in which there is little place for martial activities. Consequently, as against martial heroism, the Vaishyas preferred moral heroism which is simply an ethical way of life. One has no outward enemies to fight with; one has to conquer oneself, one's spiritual growth is to be developed. Consequently, martial heroism was replaced by moral heroism such as non-violence or *ahimsa*. The three religions of the Kshatriyas, the heterodox religions, were congenial for Vaishya temperament who patronised either Buddhism or Jainism extensively. The ruling aristocracy also supported these two heterodox religions patronised by the Vaishyas. Consequently, Buddhism and Jainism prospered in Tamil society and in a way they were instrumental in resisting Brahmanical influence that penetrated through Sanskrit.

Despite the alliance between the Kshatriyas and the Vaishyas, sometimes sharp friction may also be seen in their relationship. In

course of time, this friction developed into antagonism and this is forcefully depicted in the earliest Tamil epics. *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai* reflect the supremacy of the business community. In a way, the Jain work *Cilappatikāram* and the Buddhist work *Maṇimēkalai* emerged as the forces against ruling aristocracy. The conflict and contradiction between these two communities find artistic expression more deeply in *Cilappatikāram* than in *Maṇimēkalai.*

Political Conflict

A close reading of these two great works with their social background illustrates how Tamil literature was part of the superstructure of Tamil society. These two epics cannot be understood properly unless we take into account the socio-cultural background. *Cilappatikāram*, explicitly portrays the conflict between the affluent business community and the ruling aristocracy. In almost all Vaishya literature the ruling class is portrayed in a satirical way as incapable of administration, lacking common sense and sometimes quite villainous and foolish in its attitude. According to this epic, Kaṇṇaki, the daughter of an affluent businessman marries Kōvalaṉ, the son of another businessman of Jain faith belonging to Pūmpukār. The dichotomy in the social structure which has divided womanhood into two broad categories namely domestic wife and courtesan was in some way or other responsible for Kōvalaṉ's separation from Kaṇṇaki. The protagonist, who lost his ancestral wealth in his life of debauchery with Mātavi, repents for his mistake and starts his journey to Madurai with a view to entering into a new life by selling the anklet of his wedded wife. But, unfortunately, by an unjust order of the king

he was condemned to death on the charge that he had stolen the anklet of the queen. Outraged, Kaṇṇaki argued with the king, calling him a foolish tyrant and proved the innocence of her husband by breaking in the presence of the king her anklet which was studded with ruby. The king, realising his mistake, dies on the spot and Kaṇṇaki burns the city of Madurai in her fury and was ultimately deified as goddess Pattiṉi. A temple was consecrated for her by the ruling aristocracy represented by the Cēra king Ceṅkuṭṭuvaṉ. The stone for the statue of this deity was carried from the Himalayas on the heads of two North Indian kings Kanaka and Vijaya who had ridiculed the heroism of the Tamil kings. The consecration function was attended by kings representing various countries including Gajabhahu of Sri Lanka who prostrated before the feet of Kaṇṇaki at her *sanctum sanctorum.* She appears in the sky, blesses the kings and advises them regarding their administrative norms and moral behaviour. The whole structure of the poem itself is designed in such a way as to confirm Vaishya hegemony over the ruling aristocracy.

Maṇimēkalai

The other epic *Maṇimēkalai* also portrays the ruling aristocracy in a satirical way although its aim is more religious than social. Here again, the main character Maṇimēkalai is drawn from the Vaishya community. She is portrayed as the daughter of Kōvalaṉ and Mātavi. The son of the king Utayakumaraṉ foolishly fell in love with this Buddhist nun and he was killed for his lustful behaviour. When Maṇimēkalai was arrested, the queen who represents the ruling aristocracy, sent a man to rape her. On the

whole, kings and members of the royal aristocracy are portrayed as cruel and evil-minded in many of the episodes in *Maṇimēkalai*. The main opponent of *Maṇimēkalai* seems to be the Brahmins who are criticised vehemently throughout the epic. In this aspect *Maṇimēkalai* can be described as a Tamil epic, which has strongly exhibited resistance to Brahmanism and treated this spirit of resistance as one of its main themes. This has been powerfully portrayed in the conflict between one of its protagonists Āputtiraṉ and the Brahmins who sacrifice cows. No other epic in Tamil depicts the conflict between Brahmins and others in as powerful a way as *Maṇimēkalai*. In this respect one can say that resistance to Brahmanism was maintained in the literary works which have a Vaishya orientation.

Resistance to Sanskrit and Sanskritization is more obvious in the works of Jain and Buddhist authors than in other poets who composed secular and religious works. As already mentioned, Buddhism and Jainism originated as revolts against Brahmanism. The Buddha advised his disciples to preach the Dharma through local languages of the common man instead of Sanskrit. From the very beginning the heterodox religions were completely opposed to Sanskrit and Brahmanism and they rely mainly upon Pāli or Suraseni or Arthamagathi. When Buddhism and Jainism spread throughout India as well as the neighbouring countries, their doctrines were preached through vernacular languages. These two religions gave more importance to local beliefs, local cults, local practices and local myths. This helped Buddhist as well as Jain scholars and missionaries to proselytise very powerfully and bring their religious ideals closer to the common man.

As far as Tamil Nadu was concerned, Buddhists and Jains started reviving local stories and introduced in them their religious doctrines. The story of Kaṇṇaki was a very old and popular native myth in Tamil Nadu. The origin of this myth can be traced back to the myth of Tirumāvuṇṇi narrated in *Naṟṟiṇai*, one of the earliest anthologies of the *Caṅkam* corpus.[45] In *Naṟṟiṇai*, there is a reference to Tirumāvuṇṇi in a melancholy mood standing under a Vēṅkai tree with a single breast. This ancient story from the Dravidian part of India underwent transformation in course of time in accordance with the changing social milieu. This story travelled through the length and breadth of South India and it even entered into Sri Lanka. It survives in the folk traditions of the South Indian people in various forms.

A tale re-interpreted

The Jains and Buddhists showed keen interest in retelling the story of Tirumāuṇṇi, whose name was changed to Kaṇṇaki in due course. The primitive theme of death and resurrection is obvious in this tale and it has been interpreted from the Buddhist and Jain points of view when Buddhism and Jainism became powerful religions in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu. In Sri Lanka, the Kaṇṇaki story is presented mainly from the Buddhist point of view and Kaṇṇaki is portrayed as a votary of Buddhism.

But in Tamil Nadu the story of Kaṇṇaki is interpreted from the Jain point of view in *Cilapptikāram* and from the Buddhist point of view in *Maṇimēkalai*. In *Cilappatikāram*, which is a secular epic with a Jain background, Kaṇṇaki is depicted not only as a Jain personality but also as an embodiment of the cult of the chaste

woman known as Pattiṉi. But in *Maṇimēkalai*, she is openly presented as a Buddhist goddess. When the heroine Maṇimēkalai went to her temple to offer worship, the goddess Kaṇṇaki appears before her and repents for her act of burning Madurai causing death to so many innocent people. She says that she will take various births to get herself purified from the sin and attain eternal bliss or Nirvana after listening to the teachings of the Buddha.[46]

What is important to mention here is that instead of deriving myths from North Indian or Sanskrit sources, Buddhist and Jain authors derived the plots for their epics from native cults and through this they arrested the influence of Sanskrit and the imposition of Sanskritization in Tamil land. Although the structure of the Buddhist epic *Maṇimēkalai* is based on the Mahayana text *Gandavyuga Sutra*, the author Cāttaṉār developed his epic basing on a local character Maṇimēkalai. According to *Cilapptikāram*, Maṇimēkalai is the daughter of Kōvalaṉ and Mātavi.[47] Although Sanskrit myths were popular during that time, the authors of heterodox religions in Tamil Nadu were particular in avoiding Sanskrit stories and in reviving local myths. The stories associated with the Buddhist Jataka have been presented by Buddhist poets against a Tamil background. As far as heterodox religions are concerned, nativisation or Tamilisation was their strength in their acts of proselytism. They experimented in reviving native myths and presenting their doctrines through them. The story of Nīli is a typical example of such experimentation. This story was popular in the folk tradition of Tamil Nadu and was developed as a Jain epic entitled *Nīlakēci*.[48] With the disappearance of Jainism and Buddhism from Tamil soil, they were recast in the form of local stories of religious faiths in the folk traditions of the common man.

Tamilization

Nativisation of alien religious cults can be seen in various levels, but the attempt made on the linguistic level seems to be most significant as it was done with a view to avoiding Sanskrit influence as far as possible. If we study *Maṇimēkalai* from this point of view we can see that the author was experimenting in rendering Buddhist concepts in the native idiom or in a nativised idiom. If there was need to borrow technical terms from North Indian sources, the author Cāttaṉār tries to bring them in harmony with the phonemic structure of Tamil language. If not, he prefers their equivalent in *Pāli* which come close to Tamil phonemic pattern. We can give the following examples to illustrate this tendency.

No.	Pali	Sanskrit	Tamil
1.	attah	artha	attam
2.	amacca	amātya	ammaiccan
3.	amataṁ	amṛta	amutam
4.	kamma	karma	kaṉmam
5.	komudī	kaumudī	komuki
6.	cetiya	caitya	cēitiyam
7.	pakkha	pakṣa	pakkam

We can go on citing instances of the above kind. In the final chapter, Cāttaṉār tries to avoid even nativising words from the Northern sources and finds equivalents in Tamil by giving new meanings to Tamil words. For example, while speaking about the

instruments of knowledge in Buddhist logic, Cāttaṉar nativises the Sanskrit word *pradakṣya* (vision) as *pirattiyam* in Tamil. But, after using *pirattiyam*, he himself replaces it with a Tamil equivalent *kāṭci*, which is used in *Caṅkam* literature as a poetic situation to refer to love at first sight. Consequently, the word *kāṭci*, which was a technical term in the *akam* love poetry, is used in *Maṇimēkalai* with new semantic content to refer to one of the instruments of knowledge equivalent to the Sanskrit *pradakṣya*.

Resistance to Sanskrit or North Indian culture can be seen in a number of loan translations in the early epics. In *Cilapptikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai* following the *Caṅkam* tradition, present-day Mysore, named as Mahiṣapuri (buffalo city) is translated as *Erumaiyūr.* The Sanskrit name *Simha-pura* (Singapore) is rendered as *Arinakar* (lion city). The nativisation process can be seen in a number of events pertaining to epic characters too. One of the most important examples is the depiction of the main character Maṇimēkalai herself. The *Vinayapiṭaka*, which is one of the principal divisions of the Buddhist sacred texts *Tripiṭaka*, enumerates the rules and regulations as well as the beliefs and practices of Buddhist monks and nuns. They give codified rules and regulations to be followed strictly by monks and nuns. One of the important religious rules is that Buddhist monks and nuns should have shaved heads.

This rule posed a serious problem to the Tamil poet Cāttaṉār in presenting the heroine Maṇimēkalai before a Tamil audience. A girl with shaved head is an inauspicious being in Tamil society. Consequently, boldly violating the codes of nuns enumerated in

the sacred text *Vinayapiṭaka,* the Tamil poet Cāttaṉār introduces the Buddhist nun *Maṇimēkalai* with long hair decorated with flowers. This is really a bold venture of the Tamil poet in safeguarding the cultural heritage of his ethos. That is why we venture to call *Maṇimēkalai* a Tamil Buddhist epic in which Tamil culture is given more importance than Buddhist codes and practices. Cāttaṉār, who was nurtured in the Tamil ethos, could not present his heroine as an inauspicious being with shaved head before his Tamil audience. Consequently, throughout the epic, Maṇimēkalai is portrayed as a beautiful damsel and even the episode of the heroine standing before the house of Ātirai with begging bowl in her hand is described as *puṉaiyā ōviyam,* a painting without colourful decoration. This can be viewed as an important aspect of nativisation in depicting alien themes in stories that orginated from the Tamil soil. This type of experimentation in some way or other acted as a powerful resistance to North Indian influence and helped to maintain the uniqueness of native tradition and culture with a new interpretation.

Language of the common man

Although resistance to Brahmanical rites and excessive influence of Sanskrit were obvious among the followers of heterodox religions, their impact was felt by the laity as well as the affective religious tradition, including hymnal literature, epics, etc., But philosophical debates were mainly done in Sanskrit after the spread of Mahayana Buddhism. From the days of the Buddha onwards, attack against Brahmanical rites and Sanskrit language was strong in Buddhist circles. But with the advent of Mahayana

Buddhism with a host of Buddhist scholars well-versed in Sanskrit, it was natural that Sanskrit became the medium for philosophical reflections and logic. Although the Buddha was against logic and abstract philosophy, these entered into Buddhism as well Jainism in course of time. Even from Tamil Nadu and other parts of South India, we have a number of doyens of Buddhist philosophy and logic such as Buddhaghoṣa, Dignāga, Bodhidharma, et al. These scholars started writing interpretations in Sanskrit on the Buddhist sutras. Kāñcipuram in Tamil Nadu became a centre of learning of Buddhism similar to Nalanda in North India. There was a Buddhist university in Kañcipuram called Kadigai parallel to Nalanda of North India. The Chinese travellers Fahien and Hieun Tsang give graphic descriptions of Buddhism in South India, especially in Tamil Nadu. Hieun Tsang's travel report consists of lengthy descriptions of Buddhist centres such as Kāvirippūmpaṭṭiṉam and Kāñcipuram. Hieun Tsang also reports about the sacred Mount Potalaka which was 3000 li southward from Kāñcipuram.[49] This centre has been identified with Potikaimalai which was the seat of the Buddhist bodhisattva namely Avalokiteśvara and his consort Tāra. It is significant that this mountain is also described as the place of origin of Tamil language. Consequently, Potikaimalai has become a symbolic representation of Tamil culture. Indian literary works, in Sanskrit and Tamil, consider the Himalayas as a symbol of North Indian culture represented by Sanskrit language and the Mount Potikai as a symbol of South Indian culture especially Tamil culture. Whereas Himalayas was identified with the land of Lord Śiva, Mount Potikai was identified as the abodes of the Buddhist deity Avalokiteśvara who has lot of similarities with the cult of Śiva as is obvious from the term *īśvara* in Avalokiteśvara.[50]

Although the intelligentsia encouraged Sanskrit language as a medium of religious discourse, the common man in Tamil Nadu preferred Tamil as the medium of devotional literature. Even the ruling Pallavas also started encouraging Sanskrit learning in course of time. This is obvious from the patronage extended by the Pallava kings to Sanskrit studies. Mahendra Pallava himself wrote a Sanskrit drama *Matavilāsa Prahasanam* which is a satire on the various religions existing at that time. This period witnessed a gradual decline in Vaishya domination. Buddhism and Jainism started gradually receding in this period owing to lack of patronage from the Vaishyas who occupied affluent positions in the social stratum. With the decline of the Vaishyas, peasants started rising up in the social hierarchy. Gradually Tanjore delta area became a fertile place and agrarian culture started emerging. It was in this background that Śaivism and Vaishnavism got a fresh life with a new vigour and zest.

Tamil Devotional Works

The alliance between Vaishnavism and Saivism led to the emergence of the bhakti movement in Tamil Nadu. The bhakti movement was in a way the joint revolt of the peasants and the Brahmins against the heterodox religions on one hand and Vaisyas on the other hand. The conflict among the various *varṇas* appeared in the society in the form of religious revolt.

The bhakti movement gained momentum with Ñāṉacampantar and Appar on the one side and early Āḻvārs on the other side who started jointly their religious attack on Buddhism and Jainism. In this tug of war Buddhism faced a critical time and

the Buddhist monks started migrating from Tamil Nadu to other parts of Asia like Sri Lanka, Thailand, China, etc., Monasteries become weak and Buddhist monks lost all their royal patronage. Jainism remained a strong power, but it was not able to withstand the onslaught of the bhakti movement.

The Pallava king Mahendra Varma who embraced Jainism was converted to Śaivism by Saint Appar. Ñāṉacampantar went to the Pandya kingdom, defeated the Jains in religious debate and the king Neṭumāṟaṉ who was a Jain by faith embraced Śaivism. The Āḻvār movement with twelve Āḻvārs and the Nāyaṉmār Movement with 63 devotees and their religious ideology attracted the ruling aristocracy and the common man. From the 7th century A.D. up to the 11th century, the bhakti movement became a strong power fighting a winning battle against the weakened Buddhists and Jains. Citamparam and Śriraṅkam became centres of activities for the Saivites and Vaishnavites respectively. During this period Sanskritization became very powerful and Sanskrit influence was felt all over Tamil Nadu.

The saints of these religious movements were very particular in establishing the cultural heritage of the native soil as equal to that of North Indian culture as expressed in Sanskrit literature. Here again Sanskrit was used as a medium for philosophical and religious discourses at the highest level. For works of proselytism Tamil was used very successfully. The word *Tamil* is identified with the devotional outpouring of the Ālvārs and the Nāyaṉmārs. Bhakti has been interpreted as a movement for the revival of Tamil culture, language and music which were neglected by the Buddhists and Jains. Consequently, attempts were made by the Nāyaṉmārs and

Āḻvārs to revive the classical past. The age-old division of Tamil poetry into *akam* and *puṟam* was given a new application. In the place of the warrior hero of the *puṟam* poem we have God, the transcendental hero. Similarly, the *akam* tradition was interpreted in such a way as to portray God as the lover or the bridegroom and the soul as the lady love or the bride. Consequently, in Tamil bhakti literature we have a large number of fascinating poems which speak of divine love in the form of human love. This has been described as bridal mysticism where marriage became the central motif in the majority of Tamil devotional poems. The gods are portrayed as enjoying marital bliss with their consorts. Paradise is described as the union of male and female principles as represented in man - woman relationship or in the portrayal of the God with his consort.[51]

Revival

In fact, this was a very powerful technique adopted by orthodox religions to establish the supremacy of native tradition over heterodox religions. While Jainism and Buddhism gave importance to ascetic life, the bhakti movement laid emphasis on family life. Thus the ancient Tamil concept of *akam* tradition with family life was revived with a new interpretation with God as the bridegroom and the soul the bride. This attracted the Tamil people and it appears to them as a revival of their rich native literary traditions. Ñāṉacampantar describes God as *Uḷḷamkavar Kaḷvaṉ*[52] (the robber who has stolen away my heart). Saint Tirunāvukkaracar composed a number of poems on the theme of bridal mysticism. In the Vaishnavite canon the beautiful poems of Āṇṭaḷ challenge comparison with any such poems in the same literary genre in the world.

In this respect, the Tamil devotional poems with the theme of bridal mysticism share several similarities with the devotional poems of many Asian and European religious poems which speak about the God-soul relationship through the metaphor of marriage. We can see this trend even in the *Song of Songs* of Solomon and the New Testament tradition which describes God as the bridegroom and soul as the bride.

Music and dance have been hailed as celestial arts, means by which one can mingle with the Godhead. Music is another form of God and God himself is music. Lord Śiva is portrayed as an eternal dancer as shown in the Nataraja cult. Lord Śiva is described primarily as the God of South India and a lord of the entire world;[53] his son Murukaṉ is described as the God of Tamil Nadu. The Vaishnavite canon has been described as *Tamil vētams*, the Tamil Veda. This clearly shows that even though resistance against Sanskrit slackened, the bhakti movement tried to place Tamil on a par with Sanskrit and even sometimes superior to Sanskrit. The uniqueness of Tamil has been given due importance in all the devotional literature of Tamil Nadu. In this period we have a number of myths which directly or indirectly explain that Sanskrit and Tamil are equal in merit and importance. Lord Śiva created these two languages and gave them to Pānini and Agastiyar respectively.[54] The North Indian Agastiyar, a dwarfish figure, carried Tamil language all the way from North to the Potikai mountain in South and the Pandya kings patronised it. Although these myths seem to speak about the glory of Tamil, they imply that Tamil language came from the North. The migration of Agastiya to Potikai mountain itself is a very interesting mythical concept which needs deep scrutiny.[55]

In the period of Vālmīki Rāmayaṇa, Agastiya's migration to South was restricted to Dandakaranya which is the present Nasik district in Maharāstra. In the period of the Tamil epic *Maṇimēkalai* his migration was extended upto the Coorg region where the river Cauvery originates. According to this myth Agastiya has become the originator of the Cauvery river at the Kodagu mountain. While Agastiya was in the Kodagu region, the Buddhist deity Avalokiteśvara was the presiding deity of Potikai Mountain. *Vīracōḻiyam,* a later Buddhist grammar of the 9th century A.D., says that Agastiya learnt Tamil from Avalokiteśvara. This clearly shows the existence of both the Agastiya cult and the Avalokiteśvara cult at Potikai Mountain during 9th or 10th century A.D., With the decline of Buddhism, Avalokiteśvara was removed from the Potikai Mountain while Agastiya became the deity of this mountain, establishing a new tradition as the originator of Tamil language.[56]

Tamil nationalism first finds expression in the Tamil epic *Cilappatikāram* at the dawn of the bhakti movement. The cultural heritage of the Tamil speaking community is closely linked with Vaishnavism and Śaivism. Lord Śiva and Lord Murukaṉ were the patrons of the three Tamil academies popularly known as Tamil *Caṅkam*. The commentary of *Iṟaiyaṉār Kaḷaviyal* by Nakkīrar for the first time gives a lengthy description of the three Tamil *Caṅkam* in the Pandya country. The first *Caṅkam* was in Teṉmaturai; the second *Caṅkam* in Kapāṭapuram and the third *Caṅkam* in the present Madurai. The first *Caṅkam* and the second *Caṅkam* had Lord Śiva and Murukaṉ as their chief poets.

Myths that Glorify Tamil Cultural Heritage

According to tradition, many of Tamil texts were written under the auspices of the above academies, but most of them were lost. The extant texts are the eighteen works of *Caṅkam* literature, namely *Eṭṭuttokai* and *Pattuppāṭṭu* as well as the earlier grammtical work *Tolkāppiyam*. This tradition gives not only the list of texts composed during that age but also the names of poets and patrons who were instrumental in these literary activities. Although the term *Caṅkam* is a word popularised by the *Pāli* Buddhists,[57] it was identified as a native lexical item. Since the Pandya court was the place of meeting of poets, it was named as *kūṭal* which means meeting. The words *kūṭal* and *Caṅkam* are used as synonyms to indicate an academy of poets and scholars. A number of myths associated with the *Caṅkam* tradition also arose during this period. According to one of the myths in the *Tēvāram* songs of Appar and a detailed description of the same in the later *Tiruviḷaiyāṭal Purāṇam* (book on the Sacred Play of Lord Śiva), Lord Śiva appeared in the form of a poet and composed a poem which he gave to a poor Brahmin poet named Tarumi.[58] When Tarumi participated in the poetic competition in the Tamil *Caṅkam* and read out the poem composed by Lord Śiva, the chief Tamil poet Nakkīrar pointed out a mistake in it. This, according to him, was a mistake in the thematic content of the poem. The poem is in a form of an address to Tumpi, a butterfly. The hero of the poem asks the butterfly, which has known the fragrance of various flowers, to tell whether there is any flower whose fragrance is higher in quality than the smell of the tresses of his lady-love. According to Nakkīrar, it is a poem with a mistake in theme since the tresses of a woman has no natural fragrance. Lord Śiva appeared before Nakkīrar to defend his stand.

Nakkīrar refused to accept the justification of Lord Śiva, who, out of anger, burned the Tamil poet. This myth clearly speaks of the involvement of the supreme deity Lord Śiva in the literary activities launched by the Tamil *Caṅkam* with a view to promoting Tamil.

Although patriotic sentiments pertaining to Tamil language were deeply rooted in Tamil society during the devotional age, Sanskrit was also given due importance. At the same time one can see the attempt of poets to maintain a balance in the linguistic sentiment pertaining to Sanskrit and Tamil. They always tried to prove Tamil and Sanskrit as equal in merit. Whenever the linguistic chauvinists of Sanskrit ridiculed the greatness of Tamil language or the Tamil kings, the Tamil poets curse the Sanskrit tradition and its false supremacy over Tamil. There is another instance about Nakkīrar cursing Kuyakkōṭaṉ, who argued that Sanskrit is superior and Tamil inferior. Here the poet curses the Sanskrit scholar who later dies. This episode has been referred to by the commentator while explaining the literary genre namely *aṅkatam* (satire). According to the commentator, *aṅkatam* is a satiric work, an example being the poem sung by Nakkīrar to kill a poet in the Paṭṭimaṇṭapam, the southern door of which is always closed.[59]

> "ஆரியம் நன்று தமிழ்தீது என்றுரைத்த
> காரியத் தால்கால கோட்பட் டானைச்
> சீரிய அந்தண்பொதியில் அகத்தியனார் ஆணையால்
> செந்தமிழே தீர்க்க சுவாகா"

> "*āriyam naṉṟu Tamiḻ tītu eṉṟuraitta*
> *kāriyat tālkāla kōṭpaṭ ṭāṉaic*
> *cīriya antaṉpotiyil akattiyaṉ āṇaiyāl*
> *centamiḻē tīrkka cuvākā*"

Throughout Tamil literature, the name of the great poet Nakkīrar or Kapilar is associated with the issues pertaining to the Sanskrit-Tamil controversy. The *Caṅkam* poem *Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu* was composed by Kapilar to praise the greatness of Tamil love traditions to the North Indian King Pirakattaṉ. In the above episode Nakkīrar curses the North Indian poet who ridiculed Tamil language.

Similar myths pertaining to the three-fold Tamil, namely *iyal* (literature), *icai* (music) and *nāṭakam* (drama) emanated in the same period. Tamil is always described as elegant, having its birth from the divine ambrosia. Tamil has its birth with the southern breeze (*teṉral*) which originates from the sacred Mount Potikai which is a symbolic representation of Tamil culture. A medieval Tamil poet describes Tamil as a beautiful girl who took her birth at Potikai mountain and was brought up at the Pandya kingdom taking bath in the sacred river Vaikai and playing on the lap of the Pandya king.[60]

> "பொருப்பிலே பிறந்து தென்னன் புகழிலே கிடந்து, சங்கத்து
> இருப்பிலே இருந்து, வைகை ஏட்டிலே தவழ்ந்த பேதை
> நெருப்பிலே நின்று, கற்றோர் நினைவிலே நடந்து, ஓரென
> மருப்பிலே பயின்ற பாவை மருங்கிலே வளருகின்றாள்"

> "*poruppilē pirantu teṉṉan pukaḻilē kiṭantu, caṅkattu*
> *iruppilē iruntu, vaikai ēṭṭilē tavaḻnta pētai*
> *neruppilē niṉṟu, kaṟṟōr niṉaivilē naṭantu, ōreṉa*
> *maruppilē payiṉṟa pāvai maruṅkilē vaḷarukiṉṟāḷ*"

Lord Murukaṉ and his consort Vaḷḷi are portrayed as promoters of Tamil language. There are many legends which speak about the inspiration given by Lord Murukaṉ to Tamil poets to

compose mellifluous songs. Throughout Tamil literature Lord Murukaṉ plays the role of the greatest patron of Tamil art and culture.[61] The ecstasy and enchantment which the poets experienced in learning Tamil as well as in composing Tamil poetry is compared to the conjugal bliss enjoyed by the newly wedded couple. Tirukōvaiyār speaks about the delightful experience of a hero who had a clandestine relationship with his lady love. His delightful enjoyment is comparable to the emotional and intellectual enjoyment with the Tamil scholars at the *Caṅkam* at Madurai.

> "சிறைவான் புனற்றில்லை சிற்றம்பலத்தும் என்சிந்தை யுள்ளும்
> உறைவான் உயர்மதிற் கூடலினாய்ந்த ஒண்டீந் தமிழின்
> துறைவாய் புகுந்தனையோ. . . . ."[62]
>
> *"ciṟaivāṉ puṉaṟṟillai ciṟṟampalattum eṉcintai yuḷḷum*
> *uṟaivāṉ uyarmatiṟ kūṭaliṉāynta oṇṭīn tamiḻiṉ*
> *tuṟaivāy pukuntaṉaiyō . . . ."*

The continuity of this tradition can be seen in the 20th century poet Bharatidasan to whom Tamil scholarship and Tamil poetry are the supreme happiness which have no comparison or parallel in this world. He says that the enjoyment derived in Tamil study is superior to sexual pleasure.

> "மங்கை ஒருத்தி தரும் சுகம்
> இந்த மாத்தமிழ்ச் சுவைக்கு ஈடாகுமோ"[63]
>
> *"maṅkai orutti tarum cukam*
> *inta māttamiḻc cuvaikku īṭākumō"*

The kings of Tamil Nadu mainly patronised either Śaivism or Vaishnavism during the medieval period. In these two religions we can see two traditions functioning simultaneously, namely the

theological tradition of the intelligentsia and the affective tradition of the common man. The former tradition is described as *śāstra* while the latter is named as *stotra*. Sanskrit influence was obvious only in the former tradition and had only a meagre influence on the common man. But the fascination for Tamil language was predominant in the affective tradition, which resulted in the composition of mellifluous Tamil poems in the form of devotional outpouring or in the form of long narrative poems such as the *Kampa Rāmāyaṇam* and *Periya Puṟāṇam*. Although the Tamil version of *Rāmāyaṇam* by Kampaṉ is an adaptation from the epic of Vālmiki, the linguistic patriotism of the epic poet towards his mother tongue Tamil can be seen throughout the epic. Here again, all the names of the epic characters are Tamilised, the events are nativised and even the places are localised. The epic protagonist Rama is protrayed as a scholar of Tamil and Sanskrit.

"தென்சொற் கலைதேர்ந்தான் வடசொற்கு எல்லைகண்டான்"[64]

"*teṉcoṟ kalaitērntāṉ vaṭacoṟku ellai kaṇṭāṉ*"

Periya Purāṇam, being an epic dealing will the hagiography of a number of Śaivite saints from Tamil Nadu, gives prominent place to Tamil language.

Modern Political Changes

The Islamic conquerors as well as the Nāyak kings created an atmosphere conducive to the encouragement of the spread of Sanskrit learning at least in the upper stratum of society, the intelligentsia. Resistance to Sanskrit is seen to a lesser degree during

this period. The impact of Telugu and other languages as well as experimentation in Carnatic music reiterated Dravidian supremacy over Sanskrit hegemony. On the other hand, interest in Tamil scholarship and experimentation of various types of composition in Tamil with Sanskrit influence was also obvious under the patronage of the local chieftains and the zamindars who were a driving force in the Tamil political and social environment. The contribution of the zamindars and petty chieftains to the cause of Tamil literature was immense and this acted indirectly as a source of resistance to Sanskrit.

The courts of the zamindars played a vital role in the composition of various types of Tamil literary works popularly known as minor literature or *prabhandas*. Although Tamil tradition says that *prabhandas* are 96 in number, modern research finds that they are more than 120 in number. Although few of the above literary genres are modelled on Sanskrit works, most of them are fresh experimentations of themes from classical tradition. Literary forms such as *piḷḷaittamiḻ*, *kalampakam*, *kōvai*, *ammāṉai*, *kuṟavañci* and *paḷḷu* have their roots either in the classical tradition or in rural folk tradition. The court of the zamindars served as seats of Tamil learning; the temples also did the same function but they allowed to a larger extent Sanskrit influence. Consequently, this period witnessed a number of temple myths which are popularly known as *sthala purāṇams*. This literary genre had interaction with Sanskrit models either in theme or in structure, although they are composed in lovely Tamil verses.

Another source of patronage of Tamil art, literature and culture was the Śaivite and the Vaishnavite maths. The contribution

of Śaivite maths such as Tiruvāvaṭuturai, Tarumapuram Tiruppaṉantāḷ, etc., to Tamil learning was immense, although they are not antagonistic to Sanskrit as well. But the courts of the zamindars gave less importance to Sanskrit. The services rendered by the famous zamindars of Ūttumalai, Cēṟṟūr, Ciṅkampaṭṭi, Eṭṭaiyapuram, etc., to Tamil learning are worth mentioning and their contribution to Tamil literature of the later period is praiseworthy. In fact, they acted as centres to declare the supremacy of Tamil language and counter Sanskrit learning and its impact.

The sharp contrast between the Tamil South and Sanskrit North entered into a complex picture in due course with the advent of the Vijayanagar rule and the encroachment of Islam and Christianity. From the 17th century onwards, Tamil Nadu presents a confused socio-political picture with the impact of many forces and various religious sects fighting each other. The Islamic influence, the influence of neighbouring Dravidian languages chiefly Telugu in the field of music, the advent of the Dutch, the Portuguese, the French and the British as well as the coming of missionaries belonging to various European countries made the social set up more chaotic, complex and confused.

East and West

The advent of the printing press, the laying of the railway lines and the introduction of advanced technological civilization, the impact of ideals of liberal democracy, the introduction of Western type of education, the cultural imperialism of Lord Macaulay, etc., all exerted multifarious influences on Tamil society. Tamil identity and the concept of Tamil nationalism, etc., were

weakened. The confrontation between native learning and Western education became a powerful issue in society. The Tamil milieu concentrated in this period more on their resistance to European influences than to Sanskrit influence. The common enemy became the Britishers and not the neighbouring Aryans of North India. Consequently, attempts were made to fight against foreign domination both politically and ideologically. When the British were successful in introducing Western education with a view to producing native people loyal to the ruling British, it attracted the attention of the middle class in a big way.

Until the modern period, the object of education in traditional Tamil society was considered to be spiritual emancipation. But, with the advent of Western education, the object of learning has become seeking government employment. Although patriots, freedom fighters and the intelligentsia of this country tried to develop the concept of native education or traditional learning, it ended in miserable failure in the tug of war between the Western and the native educational systems. Since Western education was instrumental to earn an attractive livelihood, a separate class namely the middle class with Western education emerged as the vital part of the intelligentsia of Tamil society. This class was a powerful force in determining the ideological nature of the Tamil ethos. Although there were faint imitators of Western traditions, this class produced a number of writers, poets, and freedom fighters, who tried to revive and reinterpret native tradition. Tamil Nadu produced wonderful scholars and poets from this intelligentsia, many of whom became patriots fighting to liberate their motherland from British imperialism and Western yoke.

Subramania Bharati

During the freedom struggle, since the concept of India as an integrated nation was emphasized, it created the situation in which one had to accept all Indian languages as forming an organic whole. Hence, unity in diversity was the catch phrase of the Indian freedom struggle. All Indian languages, which are more than 1500 in number, had to be accepted as equal in merit and importance. Among these languages, those with a script and rich legacy of literature are deemed as the eighteen major languages (*ceppumoḻi patineṭṭu*).[65] Consequently, Tamil patriots adopted a stand in which there would not be any conflict between their regional heritage and national heritage. Consequently, regionalism was handled in such a way that it would not obstruct the national outlook. India has become the sacred mother and all the regions have been described as organic parts of her body.

The concept of an integrated India and the newly emerging spirit of nationalism allowed the influence of Sanskrit as well as an interaction among vernacular Indian languages. The common enemy had been clearly identified and the duty of the true Indian patriot was to fight against his only enemy, namely British imperialism. A true Tamil nationalist had to be a nationalist of integrated India also. Therefore regionalism and nationalism were not treated as conflicting forces but as issues to be compromised. The finest example of this trend in Tamil Nadu can be seen in Subramanya Bharati, who is a regionalist and a nationalist as well as an internationalist in his perspective. While giving eloquent descriptions of his national fervour, Bharathi speaks about a fantastic romantic excursion of a Tamilian in a boat on the river

Sindhu under the full moon light with a beautiful damsel from Kerala singing the enchanting Telugu song.[66] This is the spirit of the progressive nationalist who can be a regionalist as well as nationalist.

Yet, while speaking about the sweetness of Tamil language, Bharati says that among all the languages known to him no other language is as sweet and mellifluous as Tamil.[67] There is no place for doubting the emotional involvement of the progressive poet Bharati in his mother tongue, who, without forgetting the fact that his mother tongue forms part and parcel of Indian heritage, accepts that all Indian languages are to be respected. Bharati is a symbol of the harmonious blending of Indian nationalism and Tamil regionalism in one spirit. This was the main trend that prevailed among almost all the freedom fighters including V.V.S. Iyer, V.O. Chidambaram Pillai and others. All these pioneering writers were noted for their penchant for the mother tongue without any conflict with the greatness of the other Indian languages.

The New Wave

The attitude of native Tamils towards their mother tongue gained new momentum from the works of Bharathidasan, one of the important disciples of Subramanya Bharati. To this poet from Pondicherry, emotional sentiments in Tamil were raised to the level of a religion in which Mother Tamil was the presiding deity. It is depicted as a very powerful driving force in the Tamil race deciding its destiny. Bharathidasan and his followers sang the glory of Tamil language with the same religious fervour in which the Āḻvārs and Nāyaṉmārs glorified Viṣṇu and Śiva. There are many beautiful

poems composed by this poet giving eloquent description of the birth of Tamil language and its glory. We find this tendency even in medieval works too. There is an illustrative *veṇpā* in the grammatical work *Puṟapporuḷ Veṇpāmālai* which says that the Tamil race came into existence before the elements of this earth like sand and rock took shape. This heroic race is the first race that appeared in this universe with a sword:

"கல்தோன்றி மண்தோன்றா காலத்தே - வாளொடு
முன்தோன்றி மூத்தகுடி"

"*kaltōṉṟi maṇtōṉṟā kālattē - vāḷoṭu
muṉtōṉṟi mūtta kuṭi*"

In Bharathidasan such glorifications find powerful expression and according to him the origin of Tamil can be traceable to the origin of the earth, sky, moon, star and sun. This language is a supreme goddess and she is the Mother of all the languages of the world. There is a moving poem composed by Bharathidasan addressed to a conch asking it to blow with mirth speaking the unparalleled glory of the mother goddess Tamil.

"எங்கள் வாழ்வும் எங்கள் வளமும்
மங்காத தமிழென்று சங்கே முழங்கு"

"திங்களொடும் செழும்பரிதி தன்னோடும் விண்ணொடும் உடுக்களோடும்
மங்குல் கடல் இவற்றோடும் பிறந்த தமிழுடன் பிறந்தோம் நாங்கள்" [68]

"*eṅkaḷ vāḻvum eṅkaḷ vaḷamum
maṅkāta tamiḻeṉṟu caṅkē muḻaṅku*"

"*tiṅkaḷoṭum ceḻumparuti taṉṉōṭum viṇṇōṭum uṭukkaḷōṭum
maṅkul kaṭal ivaṟṟōṭum piṟanta tamiḻuṭaṉ piṟantōm nāṅkaḷ*"

For all the poetical glorification of Tamil by Bharathidasan, the theoretical base was given by leading scholars like Prof. P. Sundaram Pillai and others, according to whom Tamil is the mother of all the classical languages of the world.

The trend has changed since Independence. The intelligenstia felt the influence of the North, especially the imposition of Hindi, as detrimental to the growth of Tamil. It was in this background that most of such linguistic sentiments came as the revolt of the Tamils against the impact of the North.

In this stage we come across many scholars mainly from the legal profession writing about the early history of the Tamils. One of the legal experts, K. Subramania Pillai, has written the history of Tamil literature trying to justify the medieval and earlier myths pertaining to Tamil language as having historical validity.[69] V. Kanakasabai Pillai in his *Tamils 1800 Years Ago* started demythicising a number of events about Tamil kings, Tamil literature, Tamil language etc., referred to in various classics starting from the Caṅkam age to the medieval period. To these scholars, Tamil has a hoary past with an antique orgin from time immemorial.

Bharathidasan's emotional sentiments about Tamil and his enthralling and ecstatic approach to this language are obvious in many of his works. To him Tamil is the soul, breath and life and the other name for Tamil is nectar. He sings about his emotional attachment to this language as follows:

"தமிழுக்கும் அமுதென்றுபேர் - அந்தத்
தமிழ் இன்பத் தமிழ் எங்கள் உயிருக்குநேர்"[70]

"tami̱ḻukkum amuteṉṟu pēr - antat
tamiḻ iṉpattamiḻ eṅkaḷ uyirukku nēr"

Bharathidasan assumed the role of warrior to safeguard Tamil language from her enemies. He sings as follows:

"பொங்கு தமிழுக்கு இன்னல் விளைத்தால்
சங்காரம் நிஜமென்று சங்கே முழங்கு" [71]

"poṅku tamiḻukku iṉṉal viḷaittāl
caṅkāram nijameṉṟu caṅkē muḻaṅku"

In one of his beautiful poems (in *Smile of Beauty*) Bharathidasan compares himself with a bee and Tamil language with a flower garden with numerous flowers of variety having sweet honey. In the same poem he compares Tamil with the workshop of a blacksmith preparing weapons for war and himself with a warrior fighting to protect Mother Tamil from the enemies.

. . . You are the armaments factory,
I 'm a soldier there
You're a veritable forest
of flowers exuding
the sweet honey of words
pregnant with meaning
and I'm a dragon-fly
joyously drinking[72]

Thus the penchent for Tamil has been raised to the level of a religion and the lovers of Tamil imagine themselves as devotees who undertake pilgrimage to Her *sanctum sanctorum.* Many poets of this era were not only the devotees of Mother Tamil but martyrs

for the cause of protecting her. The poets of the renaissance period revelled on the potentiality of the Tamil language and we find a lot of punning upon Tamil words. They were very much delighted by the greatness, grandeur and the glory of Tamil tradition which, according to them has no parallel on this earth.

This resulted in the various movements associated with Tamil. The movement for Tamil music (தமிழிசை இயக்கம்) finds an ardent exponent in Raja Annamalai Chettiar and others. This movement tried its best to revive the hitherto neglected Tamil music and gave new life to the traditional *kīrttaṉai* and genres like *kāvaṭic cintu*, *maṭakku*, etc. Until this time Telugu songs found an important place in the assemblies. Now gradually Tamil music is finding an important place, replacing Telugu and Sanskrit songs. The number of *kīrtaṉais* composed by Subramanya Bharathi, Muthuthandavar and later by Papanasam Sivam and others gave a new momentum to this movement.[73]

The traditional Tamil dramatic forms popularly known as *kūttu* found their rebirth with Sankardas Swamigal and others who developed them in a new way in the light of Western dramas. Pammal Sambandha Mudaliyar experimented with new dramatic forms in the light of Shakespeare and tried to instil a new life to dramatic literature.

Dance is one of the important art forms which has been given a new life during the period of renaissance. The traditional *catur* dance (*caturāṭṭam*) which was preserved by temple courtesans popularly known as *devadāsis* gained a new life with the untiring efforts of Rukmani Devi Arundale. Until her time, this dance tradition was looked down upon by the elite of Tamil society. Girls

belonging to the upper caste community were reluctant to learn this tradition in the initial stage. But with the bold venture of Rukmani Devi and others and with the abolition of the *devadāsi* system, this rich tradition of Tamil Nadu was revived under the new name Bharata Natyam.

All efforts cast Tamil language and Tamil heritage in a new perspective. With the establishment of chairs for Tamil studies in Europe as well as Asian countries, the ground has been prepared for the promotion of Tamil language and culture in a wider global perspective.

It was Prof. P. Sundaram Pillai, the author of famous dramatic poetry *Manōnmaṇiyam*, who for the first time composed an invocation to Mother Tamil describing her affinity with other Dravidian languages. His song is the first poetic expression of the concept of Dravidian languages like Telugu, Malayalam, Kannada taking their origin from mother Tamil.

> "கன்னடமும் களிதெலுங்கும் கவின்மலை யாளமும்
> உன்உதிரத்தே உதித்து ஒன்றுபல ஆயிடினும். . ."
>
> "*kaṉṉaṭamum kaḷiteluṅkum kaviṉmalai yāḷamum
> uṉutirattē utittu oṉṟupala āyiṭiṉum. . .*"

This has become a slogan for the latest Tamil oriented political and social movements of Tamil Nadu.

Linguistic Identity

After the dawn of freedom in India, the problem of a common political enemy was no more in existence and again the

question of linguistic identity arose. States were formed on the basis of linguistic majorities. When India was brought under native rule, the question of South against North again arose. The grievances of South India was that the Northern rulers neglected the interest of the people of South and safeguarded only those of the North. This paved the way for the various political, social and linguistic oriented movements. The clarion call against the domination of North-Sanskrit-Hindi came from the Dravidian movement, which based its ideology on Robert Caldwell who published epoc-making book on Dravidian languages. Dravidian ideology gained momentum with E.V.R. Periyar as its harbinger. Although the concept of unified Dravidian is emphasised, this movement mainly echoed the sentiments of Tamil and the greatness of Tamil language, which was considered to be the mother of all Dravidian languages. North is identified not only with Hindi and Sanskrit but also with Brahminism by this group.

The Tamil purist movement of Maraimalai Aṭikaḷ was one of the forces that fought against alien influences more particularly Sanskrit influence and emphasised the need for Tamil purism. The followers of this group tried to avoid as far as possible any Sanskrit words in writing as well as in speaking. Devaneya Pāvāṇar, who was the author of the book *The Primary Classical Language of the world*, hailed Tamil as the mother of all the languages of the world. Social movements like the D.K. Movement as well as its offshoot D.M.K., which is a political party, all identified themselves as exponents of Tamil language and martyrs for protecting Tamil. This movement swept over the entire Tamil Nadu like a tempest

during anti-Hindi agitation and the earlier attack of Sanskrit shifted to Hindi. The eloquent speeches made by the leaders of this political party made people believe that politicians were the true servants of Tamil language and the saviours of Tamil culture. Indian National Congress, the political party which laid its stress on national integration became identified with the supporters of North as well as Hindi. The leaders of D.M.K. hailed themselves as the real saviour for protecting the mother tongue which was under the tyrannical control of the demon Hindi.

With this clarion call to protect the native tradition and native culture, they were able to get the support of the people of Tamil Nadu in 1967 and become the rulers of the Tamil land. Whether this ideology is an integral part of their political ideology or not still remains to be seen. An unbiased objective study with documented statistical evidence alone will prove whether they are real servants of Tamil or not. At any rate, a birds's eye view of the history of Tamil Nadu clearly brings home to us that the Tamils from the very beginning viewed themselves as a linguistic community whose mother tongue is in no way inferior to Sanskrit and other North Indian languages. This also makes clear that from the very beginning conscious efforts have been made to develop Tamil as a classical language by codifying theories pertaining to poetic composition.[74] Whenever the greatness of this language is questioned, voices with emotional fervour come out with definite answers. Although religions and rulers changed and there were lot of sea change in the milieu and mentality of the people, the awareness about the greatness of the mother tongue still remains

deeply rooted in the minds of the Tamil people. It is in this historical and social background that the Tamil speaking community made its appeal to the Government of India to declare Tamil as one of the classical languages of this country on a par with Sanskrit.

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7. காஞ்சிப்புராணம், தழுவக்குழைந்த படலம், பா. *248*.

8. Mr. R. Balakrishnan I.A.S., has done extensive field work on the place names of India and he has collected and computerised more than 6 lakhs of place names. His extensive field work proves beyond doubt that large number of place names of Central and North India are of Dravidian origin. Refer his paper the term Tamil — a probe, that appeared in the *Journal of the Institute of Asian Studies*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, March, 1997.

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19. தொல்காப்பியம், கற்பியல், நூ. *51*.

20. புறநானூறு, பா. *252*.

21. மேற்படி நூல், பா. *246*.

22. *The Poems of the Ancient Tamils*, G. L. Hart.

23. The colophon of *Kuṟiñcip pāṭṭu* says that this poem was composed by Kapilar to explain Tamil to the North Indian king Pirakattaṉ. Here the word Tamil indicates the *akam* love tradition and not the language. The word Tamil is used as synonym to *akam* tradition in many places.

24. "வடசொற்கிளவி வடஎழுத் தொரீஇ
எழுத்தொடு புணர்ந்த சொல்லாகும்மே"
— தொல்காப்பியம், எச்சவியல், நூ. 5.

25. A detailed description of this tradition is given in the commentary of the Tamil text *Iṟayaṉār Kaḷaviyal* by Nakkīrar.

26. புறநானூறு, பா. *194*.

27. "பாங்கரும் சிறப்பின் பல்லாற்றானும்
நில்லா உலகம் புல்லிய நெறித்தே"
— தொல்காப்பியம், பொருளதிகாரம், நூ. *78.*

28. *Kāñcit tiṇai* might have been a comparatively later theme speaking about the transient nature of the world. It is significant to note that the word Kāñci has become the name of the Pallava capital which was a centre for Buddhist and Jain philosophy.

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32. புறநானூறு, பா. *335.*

33. "பார்ப்பார்க் கல்லது பணிபறியலையே" — பதிற்றுப்பத்து, பா. *63.*

34. "புலவர்பாடும் புகழுடையோர் விசும்பின்
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செம்பு புனைந்தியற்றிய சேண் நெடும்புரிசை
உவராயீகைத் துவரையாண்டு நாற்பத்தொன்பது
வழிமுறை வந்த வேளிருள் வேளே" — புறநானூறு, பா. *201.*

36. "பகடு புறந்தருநர் பாரம் ஓம்பி
குடிபுறந் தருகுவை ஆயின், நின்
அடிபுறந் தருவர் அடங்காதோரே" — புறநானூறு, பா. *36.*

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ஒண்டொடி மகளிர் மடுப்பு, மகிழ்சிறந்து,
ஆங்கு இனிது ஒழுகுமதி - - - -" — புறநானூறு, பா. *56.*

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மேற்செய்தல் வினையின், விண்கவர்ச் சென்றேன் - - -"
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சேரநன் னாட்டிளம் பெண்களுடனே
சுந்தரத் தெலுங்கினில் பாட்டிசைத்தே
தோணிகள் ஒட்டிவிளை யாடிவருவோம்"
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9. திறனாய்வுச் சிந்தனைகள்
10. ஷெல்லியும் பாரதியும்-ஒரு புதிய பார்வை
11. இலக்கியத்தில் சமுதாயப் பார்வை
12. இலக்கிய ஒப்பாய்வுக் களங்கள்
13. கலையும் கலைக் கோட்பாடுகளும்
14. பண்பாட்டுக் கலப்பும் இலக்கிய ஒருமையும்
15. பண்பாட்டுப் பயணங்கள்
16. தமிழும் நானும் - முதற் பகுதி
17. தமிழும் நானும் - இரண்டாம் பகுதி
18. குமரி முதல் வார்சா வரை
19. உதிரும் தமிழ் மலர்கள்
20. செம்மொழிகளின் வரிசையில் தமிழ்